



NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service - - Dakota Prairie Grasslands *Caring for the Land and Serving People*

For Immediate Release

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U.S. Forest Service begins process to convey some federal land to private sector

Bismarck, ND – The U.S. Forest Service-Dakota Prairie Grasslands has begun the process to convey approximately 5,200 acres of selected parcels of national grasslands to the private sector as agreed upon in the historic Elkhorn Ranchlands acquisition and authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2008 signed December 26, 2007.

On Monday and Tuesday, officials made offers to the potential purchasers of National Forest System lands in Billings County, North Dakota.

These lands are being conveyed due to concerns raised with increasing federal ownership in Billings County as a result of the acquisition of the Elkhorn Ranchlands (Eberts Ranch), consisting of roughly 5,200 acres.

According to Dave Pieper, supervisor of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands, the legislation directing the sales provides that "...any base property landowner holding a current permit to graze any land authorized for sale...shall have a non-assignable first right to buy the land..."

In April 2007, the U.S. Forest Service acquired the last portion in a two-part acquisition of the historic Elkhorn Ranchlands in western North Dakota. President Theodore Roosevelt grazed his cattle, hunted wildlife, traveled on horseback, and wrote profusely about his experiences on this piece of land.

"The Elkhorn is a unique piece of land both historically and ecologically," said Pieper. "Theodore Roosevelt attributed his passion for conservation to his time spent in North Dakota on his ranch in the badlands."

When the Eberts were looking to sell their ranch into public ownership, they were dealt several set-backs until the USDA Forest Service offered to purchase it with the caveat that the agency would dispose of a like amount of acres. In order to do this however, the agency needed authorization from Congress.

In December, President Bush signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2008, which authorizes the conveyance of approximately 5,200 acres of National Forest System lands located in Billings County. The isolated parcels of rolling prairie, ranging in size from 160 to 640 acres, were appraised consistent with Federal law. The value of the parcels ranges from \$270 to \$350 an acre.

Pieper said he expects to complete the conveyance transactions by October 2009, if not sooner. Timing will depend upon whether or not the initial offers are accepted.

Should the initial offers not be accepted, the legislation does authorize a competitive sale. “The Forest Service would work closely with the North Dakota delegation to ensure any such sale would meet the delegations’ intent,” said Pieper.

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